Upside Down

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Upside Down

by air_of_the_Waterfall

Summary

Chiyoh comes to visit while Hannibal is in littlespace, and he's thrilled to see her. Will gets a bit overprotective and jealous, but everything works out in the end.

Notes

The title is from "Beside You" by Phildel :)

See the end of the work for more notes

Will wandered the room with his hands behind his back, exaggerating his body language because he knew he was being watched.

“Could Hannibal be… here?” he exclaimed while ducking to look under the bed. Finding the space empty as he knew he would, he pretended to sigh in confusion. “No? Well where did he go? I hope he didn’t turn *invisible* !”

A quiet giggle came from the doorway where Hannibal peeked into the room. Will grinned, then glanced his way just as Hannibal took off down the hall. Will let him get out of sight before following him downstairs. The dogs watched in confusion from the living room carpet.

“Have any of *you* guys seen Hannibal? I’ve been looking forever!”

Will could have sworn that Winston Jr. raised an exasperated brow at him, and he snickered while scratching the dog’s perked ears. Hannibal’s quiet laughter floated in from the kitchen, and Will tiptoed to the pantry door and pulled it open.

“Got you!” he grinned, and Hannibal fell over laughing where he was curled up between two cupboards.

“You got me! You got me!”

“Your turn to seek,” Will prompted with a quick tousle of Hannibal’s hair.

Hannibal, still kneeling on the ground, nodded eagerly and covered his eyes while counting to ten. Will hurried to hide in the cupboard beneath a mahogany book cabinet, grimacing at the smell of dusty wood varnish.

Of course, Hannibal sniffed Will out in seconds and clapped his hands. “I got you!”

Will gave him a high-five. “Great game. Want to do something else, now?”

“No! I want to play hide and seek! Please.”

“Okay, okay.”

He made a show of covering his eyes and Hannibal’s footsteps retreated.

A precise little knock echoed from the front door. The dogs lost their minds, barking in a chorus and hurtling across the house to scratch at it with tails whipping.

Will immediately tensed and scanned the space. No one ever came to their isolated home. He took deep breaths and listened, but the knock did not repeat. In his mind, he saw police surrounding the property with guns trained on him through the windows. *Fuck* , he hoped Hannibal was truly well-hidden, not that it would do much good if he remained in littlespace. He couldn’t defend himself in this state. He wouldn’t know what was happening or why he and Will were being dragged apart, why he was once again losing his family. He would cry

and plead and kick, and Will would beg them all to wait a moment and understand… but of course they wouldn't believe him or care. Jack Crawford would look on with triumph and Earth would crumble into dust.

It was Will's worst nightmare.

He forced himself not to panic as he slipped a knife from the kitchen and approached the door. Shooing the dogs out of the way, he peeked through the curtains… and sagged in relief. Still shaking, he dragged a hand down his face and opened the door.

"How about a few hours' notice next time?" he snapped.

Chiyoh shot him a frosty glare in return, still as a statue with her trademark Remington on her back. "Hannibal invited me. May I come in?"

Will bit his cheek and glanced behind him, then at the rifle. "Put that away."

He didn't keep guns in the house anymore. The idea of Little Hannibal getting too curious had kept Will up at night until he ditched the two he had, and now he was picturing a million more ways of the afternoon going wrong. Surely he was being paranoid… but hadn't he earned that over the years? He preferred to kill with his hands anyway.

To his surprise, Chiyoh offered him a knowing look rather than any protest. Almost absently, she slung the rifle off her shoulder, disassembled it, and put it in its case that she carried with her. Will's repeatedly abused shoulder twinged. The dogs tried to swarm Chiyoh and sniff her, but he hissed for them to stay put.

While she worked, she said, "You're very protective of him."

"I know you understand that."

She nodded, just as Hannibal flung himself downstairs practically leaping with joy.

"Chiyoh! Chiyoh! Chiyoh!"

He was on the porch in a flash and barreling into her arms, but somehow she didn't even lose her balance. He landed on his knees, hugging around her middle and looking up. Will had long since noticed that Hannibal preferred to make himself small when regressed, often playing on the floor or curling up in a ball.

Chiyoh's face transformed into sunshine as she sank down and hugged him back. "Hello, dear little one. I've missed you so."

Hannibal sighed and snuggled into her shoulder. "Chiyoh."

Then, he bounced to his feet and pulled her by the hand, dragging her off to the living room where his toys lay scattered on the carpet and couch. She smiled good-naturedly and followed along as he chattered and hopped up and down. Will was making progress in learning Lithuanian, but so far it was just words that he couldn't assemble grammatically. Hannibal said "play," "dogs," and "lunch," but something made Chiyoh laugh and Will

couldn't figure out what. He took a deep breath, closed the door, and wandered after them. The dogs followed with their tails flying about.

Hannibal hurried around the living room, showing Chiyoh his toys and presumably each one's name and backstory. Will leaned on the doorframe with a wistful grin, recalling the day he'd first met Hannibal's little self. Swallowing a lump in his throat, he tried not to be jealous that Chiyoh was the centre of attention now, or that she had a past with him that Will didn't. She was just visiting. With that, he left to start lunch and give them time alone.

He reheated some leftovers, sans the meat for Chiyoh, then peanut butter and jam and apple slices for Hannibal. He cut the sandwich into four small triangles so Hannibal could pretend to feed his dolls and stuffies. Will couldn't help but grin as he worked; once Adult Hannibal came back, he wouldn't admit to liking PB&J under threat of death, but he put it on their shopping lists all the same.

Venturing back to the living room, Will found it empty and another flare of panic seized him. What if Chiyoh's loyalties had turned? What if she was just a distraction for someone else to come in? What if… No. She once shot Will to protect Hannibal; she wouldn't hurt him. If Will listened carefully, energetic little footsteps came from the attic. He collected the plates, and sure enough he found Hannibal giving Chiyoh a very detailed tour of the playroom. Will understood most of what he heard in fragments.

"*... these are my Lego blocks… race cars… the yellow one… My dolls, Addy and Saige…"*

"Hey," Will made himself smile despite feeling awkward and intrusive. "Do you guys want lunch? I made yours *just for you* , Chiyoh."

She raised a brow at that, but she took the plate with a solemn, appreciative nod.

Hannibal clapped his hands, beaming. "Thank you, Will!"

Will kissed his hair, then sat beside him on the interlocking foam tiles of the floor and took a bite of his own food. Fairy lights cast a rose golden glow on the ceiling and the seams of each wall, intertwined with colourful murals that Hannibal had painted himself. As expected, he gathered his toys around a doll-sized table and held pieces of sandwich to their mouths. Next, he took an apple slice and offered it to Addy, Saige, and Caesar, making pretend lip-smacking noises as they "ate."

"They need vitamin C," he informed Chiyoh and Will.

Will grinned. "That's nice of you, honey, but save some for you, okay?"

Hannibal nodded and bit into his sandwich, absently bobbing his head and swaying as if to music. He stared at something in his mind, considering it carefully. After a moment, he swallowed and said, "This is very good, Will."

"Thanks," Will chuckled, "but it wasn't all that hard to make."

Hannibal shrugged. "Food is food."

With that, he left his plate and crawled away to rummage in the toy box. Will's mouth dropped open, having witnessed the most obvious discrepancy between Little and Adult Hannibal yet. Food is food? Hannibal Lecter, fastidious eater extraordinaire, had just declared PB&J on the same level as a gourmet meal? As a child himself, Will had known that mentality well. He'd rummaged in the school cafeteria garbage once or twice on especially difficult weeks. He blanched at the memory: the constant mumbling dread of being seen and pitied, the clenched yet fading ache of a week on occasional granola bars and canned soup, his dad's face gaunt from exhaustion and smokes… god, he could still feel the second-hand chemicals and stress grating his lungs and throat when he thought of it.

He considered all of this for a moment and was about to push it away, when he realized that Chiyoh's eyes shimmered with unshed tears.

"Chiyoh?"

"Everything is alright," she answered stiffly. With a blink, the tears vanished and she continued to eat.

Will considered turning his empathy on her, but he certainly wouldn't want *her* in *his* head. He would extend her a courtesy, an olive branch for Hannibal's sake if nothing else. They finished their meals in silence, watching Hannibal emerge from the toy box with a set of trains and arrange a complex track around the room. He made enthusiastic train noises and earned affectionate laughter from his companions, meanwhile Will and Chiyoh resolutely avoided looking at each other.

. . .

A little while later, Hannibal was bouncing up and down in his eagerness to go outside.

"I want to show Chiyoh my treehouse, Will! Pretty please?"

Will grinned and ruffled his hair. "Okay, I'll get the dogs."

Hannibal began to fidget, looking at the floor to say, "I wanna go with just Chiyoh."

Will tried not to show his hurt, but Chiyoh looked coolly indifferent either way and that made him lick his teeth. He tied Hannibal's shoes for him with a smile, then lightly kissed his knees which usually made him giggle. This time Hannibal only grinned and blushed, then gave Will a quick, tight hug and vanished out the door.

Will stuffed his hands in his pockets and squinted into the golden sun, passive-aggressively not speaking to Chiyoh. As she breezed past him onto the porch, she watched Will in one corner of her eye and Hannibal in the other.

"He is safe with me," she murmured.

Will nodded and ventured back to the living room. For the next half hour or so, he tried to distract himself by tidying up Hannibal's scattered toys, but that only clenched his heart with the separation. Without Hannibal, the cozy attic was nothing more than a liminal space that

Will didn't belong in. He held a silky soft stuffed bear to his face and breathed the familiar scent, leaning anxiously on a small window frame and staring out into the trees.

Forget this.

He tugged on his hiking boots and crossed the field until he merged with the dappled shade of the canopy. It was a gorgeous late spring day, splashed in lush colours and shades of green. Hannibal's gleeful voice chattered between the trees, and Will peeked around one of them to watch from a distance. Chiyoh and Hannibal knelt in the clearing beneath his treehouse, and she had started a small fire that he tossed a pine cone into.

Chiyoh had her eyes closed, sniffing the air while Hannibal watched with a wide, eager smile.

"It's a pine cone," she announced.

Hannibal bounced on his knees and clapped. "You got it right *again* , Chiyoh!"

"I've always been good at this," she teased.

"How do you say it in Japanese?"

" *Matsubokkuri* ."

" *Matsubokkuri* ," he repeated with perfect accuracy.

Chiyoh grinned. "Excellent, little one. Can you go find something else?"

He nodded and took off, carefully navigating around to avoid hurting the plants. Chiyoh likely knew that Will was there and chose to ignore him, for which he was grateful.

Hannibal called, "Close your eyes!"

Chiyoh obeyed, and he emerged from the bushes with a collection of leaves. She once again named their scents as he burned them, and his sweet smile of pride made Will want to snuggle him close and never let go.

"Do you play this game with Will?" Chiyoh asked.

"Yes. He isn't good at it, but he lets me tell him about plants. He isn't good at Lithuanian either, but he learned how to read my favourite story book in it. I like that a lot."

"That's very sweet of him," Chiyoh mused.

"Yes. Sometimes I'm too little to talk to him. It makes me sad."

"Is that why you wanted to use English with me today? To practice?"

"Yes. I like Japanese too. I couldn't talk at all and then you helped me."

Chiyoh shuffled around the fire to gently hold his face. “And I’m so proud of you. You’ve come a very long way, Hannibal. Never forget that when you’re feeling powerless.”

Hannibal sniffled, blinking into the fire and nodding.

Chiyoh smiled. “I think it’s time to go inside now. He misses you.”

She turned to reach for her stylish shoulder bag, pulling out a water bottle before offering it to him. He killed the flames with a billowing plume of smoke and snowy ash.

“ *Mizu* ,” he announced.

“ *Mizu* , yes. Very good.”

Will turned as quietly as possible and bolted across the field to the house, gasping with a tight chest and throat as he leaned on the wall. He dragged a hand down his flushed face, trembling with wistful fondness that tore him apart. Hannibal skipped through the door ahead of Chiyoh and hugged Will around the knees.

“Hi, Will!”

Will chuckled and dropped down to hold him properly. “Hi, sweetheart. Did you have fun?”

“Mm hmm.”

Will tucked a strand of Hannibal’s feathery hair away from his forehead, and Hannibal nuzzled his hand like a cat. The lives they’d spent apart stretched and howled like barren tundras. Sometimes they couldn’t understand each other as well as they’d like to, but they could hold dear the simple language of touch. Hannibal had taken his sweet time carving his way into Will’s heart, only to heal the wounds and leave shimmering scars. Will hadn’t always been there when Hannibal needed him, but he could be now and he always would.

Chiyoh cleared her throat and said, “I’ll be leaving now.”

Will surprised himself by blurting, “Stay for dinner.”

She narrowed her eyes.

Will shrugged. “Or don’t. Either way.”

Hannibal gave Chiyoh puppy dog eyes and scooted over to hug her goodbye. “Will you come back soon?”

She ruffled his hair. “Whenever you’d like.”

“Wait! I made something for you!”

He hurried upstairs, leaving Will and Chiyoh in awkward silence. At least, it was awkward for Will; she seemed capable of nothing but poise.

“You were testing me when you brought the rifle. To see if I’d make you get rid of it.”

She blinked. “Even those you trust can turn against you. I know you understand that. Best not to take any chances.”

Will narrowed his eyes. “I never said I trusted you.”

“Then we have more in common than we knew, but I do trust Hannibal’s judgement. If he lets you care for him in his most vulnerable state… I suppose I have to have faith in you.”

He wouldn’t let on how much this meant to him, but he nodded gruffly and turned to pet his dogs. Begrudging respect was the best he and Chiyoh were going to get amongst themselves, but it worked.

Hannibal reappeared with a drawing, mounted on cardboard and framed by hot-glued popsicle sticks. He’d drawn the three of them in impressive likeness, not up to par with his adult self but better than the average child would manage. Between Chiyoh and Hannibal stood a girl who could only be Mischa, and Will and Hannibal were holding hands. Their names hovered above their heads in blue marker, and they were surrounded by dogs.

“Our family,” Hannibal announced.

Will smiled. “It’s beautiful.”

End Notes

Matsubokkuri = Pine cone
Mizu = water

(I think. Google Translate may have failed me)

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